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ABSTRACT

The graphemic and functional distribution of Chinese punctuation markers are outlined, and the implications of Chinese punctuation practices for second language instruction are discussed. Three kinds of Chinese punctuation markers are described: those graphically unique to Chinese, those written and used in the same manner in both Chinese and English systems, and those that are graphemically identical but are used differently. Special attention is given to the last category, potentially the most problematic for students of Chinese as a second language, and especially to the functional load and pedagogical value of commas in Chinese texts. If students are aware of the usage patterns, a major source of confusion can be overcome and students can learn to read Chinese more quickly, more efficiently, and with greater comprehension. (MSE)

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PUNCTUATION MARKERS AND CSL READING COMPREHENSION

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

There are a few markers which Chinese have used for centuries to punctuate texts, but the majority of punctuation markers currently used were adopted in the 20th Century, mainly in the aftermath of the May 4th Movement. Most of these markers are graphemically modeled after Western punctuation markers:e.g., the comma (,), the exclamation mark (!), quotation marks ("and '), the question mark (?), the colon (:), the semi-colon (;), the dash (-), etc. Other markers are unique to Chinese texts and texts influenced by Chinese writing practices:e.g., symbols such as 《 》, 〈 〉 , 「」 , or ﹏ which are used to indicate titles of written works, the solid line placed either to the left or underneath characters to mark the names of people and places, and the enumerative comma (、) which is used to mark lists of nouns or grammatical constructions of approximately equal value.

Most of the punctuation markers which are graphemically similar to those found in Western texts are also used in ways similar to their usages in the West. For example, double and single quotation marks (" and ') are used to mark direct quotation of speech and to indicate special usages of words, terms, and phrases. Colons are used to set off or introduce following materials, and semi-colons are used to mark grammatically independent yet conceptually linked sub-units of sentences. Chinese sentence end markers (。) are graphemically slightly different in being an empty rather than ink filled circle, but they are placed in horizontally printed texts in the same position as in Western texts and are similarly used to mark the end of sentences.

Other markers have exactly the same graphemic shapes as those in Western texts, but Venetzky's assertion that "Western punctuation is used, however, in exactly the same way that it is employed in English script."(1) not to the contrary, they often have differing functions. The solid period (.) for example, has several different usages in Chinese texts. It is placed at mid height in horizontally printed sentences to indicate divisions within foreign names, and sub-divisions within dates. It also marks emphasis and ellipsis depending upon its positioning in a sentence. The comma, the most important example of different usages of a familiar graphemic form, is used for some different purposes in Chinese that it is in English texts.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

Knowledge of the graphemic representations and the specific functions of Chinese punctuation markers will increase reading efficiency and comprehension for CSL students working with Chinese texts. Awareness of the functions of the uniquely Chinese markers and of the similarities and dissimilarities in usages of familar punctuation shapes can be a valuable tool in comprehending all levels

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and styles of modern Chinese vernacular texts. Using this awareness of Chinese punctuation practices to approach a text is helpful all stages of CSL work, but it is especially important at the crucial stage at the end of second year and the beginning of third year when students are starting to work with longer and more complex sentences. CSL students can particularly benefit at this point from hard work aimed at developing an understanding of how to recognize and utilize punctuation markers when reading.

In the remainder of this paper I will sketch an outline of the graphemic and functional distribution of Chinese punctuation markers, and I will also comment on the implications Chinese punctuation practises have for CSL pedagogy. Chinese punctuation markers fall into three groups:those graphically unique to Chinese, those written and used in the same manner in both writing systems, and those which are graphemically identical but which are used differently. This last group is potentially the most problematic for CSL students. When students are unaware of the differing usages and incorrectly assume similarity of function along with similarity of shape, reading efficiency falls and comprehension drops. For this reason, I will devote special emphasis to a preliminary discussion of the functional load and pedagogical value of commas in in Chinese texts. Chinese commas are graphemically identical to English commas, but within a sentence they are function very differently. If students are aware of these differences in usage patterns, one major source of confusion can be turned into knowledge of how to read Chinese more quickly, more efficently and with greater comprehension.

2.1 GRAPHEMICALLY UNIQUE CHINESE PUNCTUATION MARKERS

These markers are doubly helpful to CSL students since they are graphemically new to them and thus more easily remembered and recognized. They also have unique functional loads which can be memorized and utilized while reading without fear of interference from graphemically familiar but functionally different English usages.

2.1.1 Enumerative Comma Marker (、) 頓號

Among the Chinese punctuation markers which have no direct English counterparts, the enumerative comma is most commonly used in modern vernacular writings. It is graphemically shaped as a top-left to bottom-right diagonal line about 1/3 of the height of a character and is placed mid level in a character space in texts. It is used in modern texts to mark lists of items, usually nouns, but it also sometimes marks a series of more involved grammatical structures. Enumerative commas are placed between the individual members of any number of nouns (or roughly equal grammatical structures) with a conjunction, usually 和 , between the penultimate and the final item of list.

N.B. Commas which are graphemically identical to Western commas are sometimes used where enumerative commas might be, but the reverse is never found. (See 2.3.5)

2.1.2 Literary Title Markers 《》、〈〉、『』、﹏ 書名號

There are several punctuation markers used to indicate the names or titles of literary works and the names of sub-sections of literary works. They are graphemically unique to Chinese and hence

easily recognisable. Markers such as 《 or 〈 are placed in the character space before a literary title to mark its head, and 》 or 〉 are placed in the space immediately after a title to mark its end in PRC texts. Literary titles in ROC texts can be marked by placement of the marker ⏦ underneath each character of the title, or by placing the marker ⌜ in the upper left of the character space preceeding a title and the marker ⌟ at the bottom right of the space following the title of a literary work. (The graphemically similar but functionally distinct markers ⌜⌟ and 「 」 have been used in some texts to mark direct quotation of speech in literary narrative. See 2.1.6 and 2.2.4) A solid period placed at mid level has occassionally been used to mark the subdivisions of title and chapter titles in literary works. See 2.3.3 for further comment on this point.

Note that in PRC texts the marker ⏦ placed mid level in a character space represents a rising and falling of a voice in chanting or singing. When placed under characters ⏦ indicates emphasis on the underlined portion of a PRC text.

2.1.3 Parentheses Markers （）、【】、〔〕、（） 括號

Chinese parentheses function in essentially the same manner as they do in English, to mark an amplifying or explanatory word or phrase. Two of the markers are graphemically unique to Chinese, 【】. One has the same form as it does in English （） , and one 〔〕 has a graphemic representation which has different functions than it does in English. Each marker given one character space. （ , 【 , 〔 and （ are placed before and ） , 】 , 〕 and ） are placed after the parenthetical material to mark its head and end. (See 2.3.4 for further comments on ⌜⌟).

2.1.4 Missing Character Markers □ 虛缺號

An empty square is used to indicate that characters have been lost from a text. This marker fills a character space, and one marker is used to represent each missing character. This marker occurs mostly in printings and studies of ancient texts and is not to be confused with X and O which authors use to mark words which have been chosen for whatever reason not to be written out. (X and are O discussed in 2.3.2)

2.1.5 Emphasis Markers X、○、・、△、⏦、● 着重號

○ a mid sized hollow circle, or a small solid circle • , or △, ⏦ ,or rarely ⊙ , are placed under horizontally printed and beside vertically printed characters to mark emphasis on that portion of the text. Students should be cautioned to note carefully that the placement of • reflects a basic difference in its function. As discussed below in 2.3.3, it marks subdivisions of foreign names, time, etc. when placed mid level in sentences.

2.1.6 Quotation or Dialogue Markers 「」、⌜⌟ 引號

These markers are usually found only in vertically printed texts where they are placed to the upper left of the preceeding character space to mark the head and to the bottom right of the following character space to mark the end of speech. ⌜⌟ is used to

indicate direct quotation, and 「 」 is used to mark speech quoted within a quotation when 『』 is used within the same text, although the reverse is also found. Used independently, 「 」 marks direct quotation. (See also 2.2.4.)

This marker graphemically differs from the title marker 『』 in having a longer and thinner horizontal section and a thin, shorter vertical section. The title marker 『』 has equal horizontal and vertical axes, both of which are wider than the quotation marker. See 2.1.2.

2.2 GRAPHEMICALLY AND FUNCTIONALLY SIMILAR PUNCTUATION MARKERS

These are markers which are written in the same way in both writing systems and which have very similar if not identical usage patterns.

2.2.1 Sentence Final Marker 。 句號

The Chinese sentence end marker is written as a small hollow circle (。) which is placed in the next space to the bottom right of the last character in a horizontal sentence or in the next space directly under the last character in a vertically written sentence. (It is also placed, rarely, at the bottom right of a character in the same character space in vertical texts.) While graphemically slightly different, it functions in the same manner as the ink filled circle placed at the bottom right of English sentences to mark the sentence end, regardless of the sentence length. With this in mind, students may be taught to rely on it to determine the basic internal subdivisions within a Chinese paragraph. (See 2.3.3 for a description of the functions of the Chinese graphemic equivalent of the English period.)

2.2.2 Question Marker ？ 問號

The question marker, normally found at sentence end, has the same graphemic representation as in English and is similarly used to indicate a question. It is placed in the full character space following the last character of the interrogative sentence.

2.2.3 Exclamation Marker ！ 感嘆～感情號

An exclamation mark is used to indicate a strong state of emotion, whether joy, hate, stress, surprise, or some other feeling. It usually appears at sentence end where it takes up a full character space, though it occassionally will appear within parentheses in a sentence. Under special circumstances, two or three exclamation markers can be used at sentence end to mark a particularly intense emotional situation. As is occasionally found in English texts, a question mark and an exclamation mark can be placed together at sentence end to indicate an admixture of emotional states within the same sentence.

2.2.4 Quotation or Dialogue Markers “”、‘’ 引號

These markers are used to indicate dialogue or direct quotation of speech. They are placed in the upper left part of the space preceeding and either the upper right or lower left space following the quoted speech. The head markers are written “ or ‘ and the end markers as ” or ’ . As in English, double quotes (“”) indicate direct quotation of speech, while single quotes (‘’) usually indicate quotation within a quote. Quotation markers, either double or

single, also used to indicate a special usage of a word or phrase. (See also 2.1.6 for uniquely Chinese quotation or dialogue markers.)

2.2.5 Ellipsis Markers …… 省略號

This marker is graphemically identical to the English ellipsis marker, but it is placed at mid level in sentences rather at the bottom of the line to mark that portions of a text have been deleted or omitted. A total of six or so of these markers taking up two character spaces are used in Chinese texts whereas three markers are used in English texts.

See further 2.3.2 where the function of a markers of tabooed, forbidden or undesirable words are discussed.

2.2.6 Colon Marker ： 冒號

A Chinese colon marker is graphemically identical to an English one. However, it is placed at the bottom left of the next space rather than at mid level where it is found in English texts. The two colons have several functions in common:they both are used to introduce following materials, and both are used by some writers in place of a comma to mark that direct quotation of speech follows. Both are also used as markers for subdivisions of time and literary titles, and both are used to mark the end of a salutation in letters. Chinese colons further function to mark summaries or restatements of previous elements of a sentence. In this usage, a Chinese colon may separate grammatical elements an English colon never would:e.g., separate a verb from an object.

2.2.7 Semi-colon Marker ； 分號

Chinese writers employ semi-colons written with the same graphemic representation in the same way as English writers do. Semi-colons separate and mark grammatically independent parts of sentences, and they mark separation of elements of a series in which some elements are internally marked by commas. As in English, the semi-colon can also be used to mark stress or emphasis. A semi-colon takes up one space and is placed at the bottom left side of the space.

CSL students shold be taught to recognise both colons and semi-colons as markers of the grammatical separateness of basic sub-divisions of sentences. They should come to recognise these two markers as very handy indicators of where to start an analysis of the structures of complicated sentences.

2.2.8 Dash Marker — 破折號

The Chinese dash is written as a straight line which takes up two spaces. It is placed at mid level in sentences which sometimes leads beginning students to mistake it for the character — "one". In both Chinese and English, dashes can be used in numerous ways. Dashes mark the head and end of parenthetical information in sentences, and they connect independent clauses and phrases in sentences. Dashes also indicate interruption in as well as mark a change in thought within a sentence.

2.2.9 Hyphen Marker - 連接號

The marker - is used to mark and link categories of items and spans of time and distances. It can occupy either one of two character spaces and is placed at mid level between the items marked. The only graphemic difference it has with the dash is that it can be either one or two character spaces in length. It too is susceptible to being mistaken for the character — 'one.'

2.2.10 Parenthesis Markers ( ) 31號
See 2.1.3 for discussion of ( ) .

2.2.11 Miscellaneous Infrequently Used Markers 等類標點符號
There are twelve or so other punctuation markers which are graphemically and functionally identical in both systems though they are not commonly encountered. These markers are the tilde ~ , the caret ^ , the slant / , the asterisk * , the dagger † , the double dagger ‡ , the arrow → , the paragraph marker ¶ , the section or numbered clause marker § , the index marker ☞ , and the parallel marker // . Because of their functional similarities in both systems and their relatively infrequent occurrences, I will not discuss them individually here.

2.3 GRAPHEMICALLY SIMILAR BUT FUNCTIONALLY DIFFERENT MARKERS
A constant source of possible confusion for CSL students lies with those punctuation markers which have familar shapes but some very different usages. Students need to be thoroughly aware of their specific usages in order to avoid inaccuracies while reading Chinese texts.

2.3.1 Proper Noun Marker —— 專名號
A solid line of varying length placed underneath characters (or to the left of vertically printed characters) indicates a name in Chinese texts. This usage is at variance with its function in English to mark stress or emphasis. The name may be either Chinese or foreign, and it may be the name of either a person, place, political period or of an organization. Though not much used in texts from the People's Republic of China, this marker is still frequently found in older texts and those from the Republic of China. Names can be a great puzzle to second and third year students, especially the names of people, so recognition of the function of this marker can increase both reading efficiency and comprehension rates.

See also the function of the solid circle marker in foreign names as discussed in 2.3.3.

2.3.2 Tabooed Word Markers X、O 隱諱號
Chinese writers make use of the markers X or O , a circle which nearly fills a full character slot in a line, to indicate words which have been purposefully not written out because of their tabooed or undesirable nature. These graphemic shapes are of course familiar to CSL students, but they are not used as punctuation markers in English. In Chinese texts each missing character is marked by one taboo marker.

2.3.3 Solid Circle Marker • 省略、着重、間隔等號

The punctuation marker written as a small solid circle has several functions, some of which have been touched upon above. Students must not regard it as the reliable old English friend which marks the end of sentences, but more as a new cousin wich acts a bit differently depending on where it physically is in the sentence. When it is placed at mid level between characters in a sentence, CSL students should reconsize it as a very helpful tool which points out that the characters which are on either side of it are being used to represent a foreign name or a point in time. It is also occasionally used to similarly separate subdivisions in addresses and to mark the break between the name of a literary work and its subdivisions.

Placed under or beside a character, this marker indicates emphasis. See 2.1.5 for discussion and examples.

It also functions to indicate ellipsis when used in strings of six or so. See 2.2.5 above.

2.3.4 Parentheses Markers 〔 〕 括號

The bracket markers 〔 〕 are used within quotations in English language texts to enclose material that is not part of the quotation. ( ) markers function in Chinese texts as general duty parentheses markers. See 2.1.3 for further discussion.

2.3.5 Comma Marker ， 逗號

Commas and sentence end markers are the two most frequently encountered punctuation markers in Chinese texts. As discussed in 2.2.1 above, the two somewhat graphemically different sentence end markers present few if any problems for CSL students. The situation with commas is not nearly as simple.

A Chinese comma has a reassuringly familiar graphemic shape (，) which is placed in the same physical position in sentences in both languages--at the bottom left of the next space after the last preceeding character or letter. When second and third year CSL students see a comma in a sea of characters, it seems like a safe old port in which to rest and scan the horizon. However, it often turns out to be a rugged anchorage because while Chinese commas share several overlapping functions with their English twins, the basic usages of the two proceed from different conceptual and functional foundations. Simply stated, while both are used to mark pauses within sentences, this is a minor function in English sentences when compared with its use to mark and separate grammatical structures. Marking pauses in Chinese sentences, and by doing so marking the stress and emphasis associated with pauses, is the major function of a comma in Chinese usage.(5) Grammatical integrity within a Chinese sentence must be observed when placing commas, but it is observed in a way which is often very different from how English comma usage observes grammatical structure. As a result, the pauses which commas mark in Chinese sentences may or may not fall at the grammatical points where CSL students are accustomed to finding commas in English sentences. In fact Chinese commas often appear in positions which can confuse CSL students who are not aware of the differences in usages.

Thus our CSL students who have had years of training in English classes to avoid using a comma to separate a subject from its verb or a verb from its object in a clause bring that understanding of comma functions to their reading of Chinese structures such as S，TPVO or T，P，SVO or A，是 B or A 是 ，B and so on. Students are easily confused

by sentences such as these in which a comma separates a subject from its verb, a verb from its object, the place and/or time from the rest of the sentence, and the like. Their English language training stimulates them to find an independent or dependent clause or a phrase in what may be nothing more than a heavily modified subject,object or place structure in the Chinese. At best their search for what is not there is inefficient; at worst they will create something which is not there and misunderstand the sentence.

In the final few minutes here, my concern will be to examine several common Chinese comma usages and compare them with what American CSL students are accustomed to when working with commas in English. English comma usages not found in Chinese texts will not be considered. This focus naturally leads to comments on how CSL students can be trained to use commas as reliable guides for reading Chinese efficiently and with greater comprehension. The training process tends to be laborious, and at the start unpleasantly akin to decoding, but once the skill of 'seeing' and utilizing the specific functions of Chinese commas (and the rest of the Chinese punctuation markers) is mastered, CSL students are one large step closer to using automatic and semi-automatic reading processes with Chinese as they already do with English texts.

2.3.5.1 Similarities in Comma Functions

The one shared comma function which is perhaps most useful as a guide for CSL student reading comprehension is the use of commas in both Chinese and English texts to mark the end of dependent clauses and the equivalent of English prepositional phrases. Students should be taught to regard a comma placed after vocabulary items such as 的時候，以前，以後 and their synonyms as an indicater that preceeding the comma there is a verb centered structure which should first anlayzed and understood as a unit before the material following that comma is dealt with. They must know to expect virtually any grammatical structure there and to look for its verb center as the first step in understanding its structure and meaning.

In the following example:

…… 当中国乒乓球代表团参观底特律的一家汽車工厂时，……

if students can identify 参观 as the verb center, they can readily understand the grammatical structure preceeding the comma is SVO, understand it as the Chinese equivalent of 'When the subject verbs the object, ...', place that sentence segement in short term memory, and then proceed with processing the remainder of the sentence. Students should cultivate the habit of identifying the comma unit, locating the verb center, and from that discerning the grammatical structure of the dependent clause.

Other sentence initial dependent clauses are headed by vocabulary such as 如果，雖然，因爲，etc. or their synonyms. Knowing that structures headed by such vocabulary items are normally end marked by a comma facilitates the task of CSL students in processing a sentence such as:

除了美国首都以外，……

Students should be trained to recognise the boundaries of this sort of dependent clause and to understand its internal grammar in the manner sketched above.

When Chinese prepositional phrases preceed the subject (or an object in a topic comment structure), those phrases must be marked by a following comma. That is, structures headed by 在，为了，根据 or a synonym will be end marked by a comma in normal usage, even if the phrase is fairly lengthy as in:

我以为，为了中美两国的利益和世界和平的利益，为了两国友好关系的顺利发展，…

or

据《美国新闻》报道，……

Clarity in understanding this relieves student anxiety about an apparent violation of the SPV or SVP rule that states place can only follow the subject and/or time or the main verb of a sentence. Once aware that Chinese allows prepositionins of place elements of sentences for emphasis so long as the elements are marked by a comma, student processing efficiency of sentences such as the followins is increased:

据美国联邦调查局八月八日公布的材料，一九七二年，在美国发生的……

Students must be able to identify the comma unit by recognizing the vocabulary items which can mark the head of this sort of phrase and realizing that since structures so marked are noun centered and have no verb center, what at first may appear to be a verb, eg. 公布 in the above example, is simply part of the modification structure of the noun center. Once this skill is in place, students will not attempt to make a clause out of a phrase.

Students should also be aware that both Chinese and English punctuation practices use commas to mark the head of direct quotations and to mark breaks or transitions in thought within sentences.

2.3.5.2 Differences in Comma Usages

There are two very frequent comma useges in Chinese texts which, because they are opposite to normal English usages, very frequently confuse CSL students. These two practices are using a comma to separate a subject from its verb or a verb from its object and to separate compound verbs from each other. The first usage is perhaps the single most confusing and misleading Chinese punctuation practice for CSL students accustomed to English punctuation usages.

"Do not separate a subject and verb, or verb and object...with a comma." (6) is a command representative of the understanding of a fundamental principle of English comma usage which CSL students bring to their reading of Chinese texts. Thus, when they read a text such as:

……正在装配线上紧张劳动的工人，……

they commonly attempt to translate it as "The workers were working feverishly on the assembly line." rather than seeing it as a relative clause. While this translation does not do great violence to the underlying meaning of this sentence, besides being technically wrong, seeing what is in fact a modified subject as instead a SPVO structure skews the students ability to comprehend the remainder of the

sentence. Sometimes, as in this example, this misreading does not make much difference and the essential meaning of the sentence is grasped, but sometimes failing to recognize that a comma separates the subject(s) from the verb(s) or the verb(s) from the object(s) can lead to complete befuddlement about the meaning of a sentence.

"Do not separate compound predicates with a comma except for good reason." (8) Since our students are used to the possibility of seeing compound verbs separated from each other by a comma, this usage causes fewer problems in comprehension, but it is still difficult for students to handle sentences such as:

这一次他在中国访问了北京、延安、上海和广州等城市，了解了中国人民经历的苦难和斗争，分享了中国人民今日的欢乐。

or

美国政府一方面再三表示，承认一个中国，承认中华人民共和国是唯一合法政府，关心台湾问题的和平解决，但同时坚持向台湾出售武器，严重干涉我国内政，实际上鼓励了台湾当局拒绝通过和平谈判实现祖国统一，阻挠台湾问题的和平解决，这是不是明显的自相矛盾吗？

where the second verb is not only separated by a comma but also by a lengthy structure modifying the object of the first verb. Students often have difficulty identifying the subject of the comma separated second verb, or the third or fourth comma separated verb, especially when there are modified objects involved. Drilling students on this usage will teach them that when they find a comma unit which has a main verb without a subject they should look to the immediately preceeding comma unit for the subject.

2.4 SUMMARY

Punctuation markers in all writing systems have the function of assisting the reader read a text. If CSL students are aware of Chinese punctuation practices and understand how Chinese writers use them to shape their writings, the students will be able to read Chinese with greater efficiency, deeper comprehension, and growing confidence.